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PGP MAGAZINE FOR DEVELOPING FARMERS



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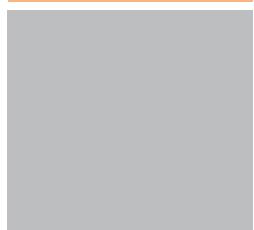
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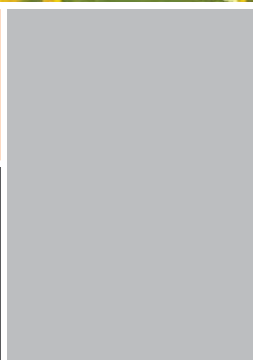


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Top tips FOR FARMERS

For farmers, February is the ideal time to evaluate the crop performance and identify problem aspects so that it can be corrected. Farm management and planning form an integral part of a successful season. Here is advice from team members of the Farmer Development Programme.



Keep your eyes on the crops

If favourable conditions are present, February is the time when the maize is growing. It is not the time to relax though, according to regional development managers in North West, Mpumalanga and Limpopo.

'This is the time to scout for pests and diseases,' says Jerry Mthombothi from PGP's Mbombela office. Du Toit van der Westhuizen from the Lichtenburg office agrees and adds that it is also important to see if there are any crop deficiencies. 'Act as soon as possible.'

February is the time for weed control. In North West especially, it is important that post-emergence chemicals have been applied and that the fields have been cleaned. 'And where topdressing is needed, make sure you apply the right amount,' says Du Toit.



Plan ahead for success

In February you can prepare for the harvesting season and check the market availability of your crop, Jerry suggests. 'There is always something to do on the farm, even if it is just getting your administration up to date or planning for the next season.' Remember, failing to plan means planning to fail.



Feed the hungry

Timon Filter, trainer and mentor from Piet Retief, is known for his missionary heart. He urges farmers to remember that their hard work should not just be about farming, but about supporting others who are less fortunate.

He encourages farmers in his study groups to help eradicate hunger in their communities and to make it the study group's goal to ensure that there is not one hungry person in the community while they are farmers planting maize. He also reminds farmers that worrying does not help the farming operation. 'Keep your faith and trust God.' ■

COMPILED BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR: PULA



MADE POSSIBLE BY PANNAR

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QUICK IDENTIFICATION

can safeguard your crop

MAIZE FARMING IN SOUTH AFRICA CAN BE CHALLENGING, ESPECIALLY DURING THE GROWING SEASON WHEN FARMERS MAY NOTICE UNUSUAL SIGNS SUCH AS WILTING, YELLOWING LEAVES OR STUNTED GROWTH. THESE SYMPTOMS CAN BE EARLY SIGNS OF PEST OR DISEASE PROBLEMS, WHICH CAN LEAD TO SIGNIFICANT CROP LOSSES IF NOT IDENTIFIED AND TREATED QUICKLY.

Fortunately, there are resources available to help farmers identify and manage these challenges. One of the most valuable tools for farmers facing midseason difficulties is the Grain Pest and Disease Extension and Diagnostic Clinic run by the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute (FABI) at the University of Pretoria.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DISEASE DETECTION

Plant diseases, whether fungal, viral or bacterial, can spread quickly and have a serious impact on yields if not detected early.

During the midseason, crops are at a critical growth stage and any disease can significantly affect its development. Farmers who notice strange symptoms on their crops may not know the cause, which makes it difficult to address the issue quickly. This is where diagnostic clinics like FABI come in. By providing an early and accurate disease diagnosis, FABI helps farmers take the right steps to protect their crops. Timely action is essential, as the right treatment or intervention can prevent further damage and improve overall farm productivity.

HOW TO USE THE CLINIC'S SERVICES

1. Farmers who notice strange symptoms on their grain crops can use the clinic's services by submitting samples for a diagnosis. The process is simple and involves sending plant material to the clinic for analysis.
2. FABI encourages farmers to work with their local extension officers, who can help collect and submit samples on their behalf.
3. Farmers can also use the Biosecurity app to report pest and disease issues directly. This app helps to quickly gather data, which is shared with FABI's diagnostic team for a faster analysis and response.

Methods

- **Submitting a sample:** You can send plant samples directly to the Diagnostic Clinic for analysis. Submission guidelines are provided in **Figure 1**.
- **Working with extension officers:** Local extension officers can assist with collecting and submitting samples on farmers' behalf.
- **Using the Biosecurity app:** Report pest and disease issues directly through the app. This speeds up the diagnostic process and helps to protect not only your farm, but the broader farming community.



The smallholder farmers in Venda were thrilled to meet the FABI extension team during their Limpopo visit.



The FABI extension team collecting samples.



SUPPORT FOR FARMERS

FABI’s diagnostic clinic is a key resource for farmers. It offers expert disease diagnosis and identification of pests and pathogens that may be affecting crops.

Here is how the clinic supports farmers:

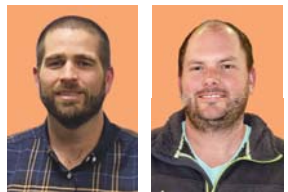
- 1. Extension and surveillance:** The team actively engages with farmer communities in key developing grain-producing regions in South Africa. Extension officers visit farms, conduct surveys and monitor disease outbreaks. Extension officers visit farms in key developing grain-producing regions to conduct surveys and monitor disease outbreaks. These visits help farmers to identify threats early and prevent larger outbreaks.
- 2. Disease diagnosis:** The clinic provides diagnostic services to farmers, helping them to identify and manage diseases affecting their crops. Alternatively, samples of diseased plants can be submitted via courier to the clinic for analysis.
- 3. Knowledge sharing:** The programme disseminates information on disease management practices through various channels, including workshops, farmers’ days, field days and online resources. Resources are also shared with research programmes that aim to better understand the biology of pests and diseases, which will aid future management practices.
- 4. Long-term monitoring:** The clinic established several sentinel plots that are monitored for pests and diseases. Together with routine

farm visits, the clinic is building long-term monitoring data on pests and diseases affecting grain production in the country.

Collected information is captured in the cloud via the Information Hub app, which contributes to biosecurity efforts in the country. Using this data, the team is developing pests and disease distribution maps for South Africa that will filter into future early warning detection systems for farming communities.

CONCLUSION

The diagnostic clinic offers expert support, and with the help of extension services, digital tool and a network of specialists, farmers can quickly identify issues and take action to safeguard their crops. By using these resources, farmers can maintain healthier plants and achieve better yields, even in the face of unexpected challenges. If you’re a farmer worried about your crops, don’t hesitate to reach out to FABI for help. ■



PROF COBUS VISAGIE AND DR DAVID READ, FABI, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Tips to reduce erosion and improve soil health

IN SOUTH AFRICA, SOIL EROSION IS A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE THAT AFFECTS AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY AND LAND USE. THE PROBLEM OF LAND DEGRADATION DUE TO EROSION IS WIDESPREAD, PARTICULARLY IN AREAS WITH STEEP SLOPES, INTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND LIMITED SOIL CONSERVATION PRACTICES.

While exact figures on how much land is wasted specifically due to erosion vary, the South African government and research organisations estimate that approximately 10% to 20% of South Africa's agricultural land is affected by erosion to varying degrees. Some studies suggest that about 12 million ha of land is affected by severe erosion, which includes both sheet erosion (gradual loss of soil over large areas) and gully erosion (deep, visible channels formed by water run-off).

KEY CAUSES

- **Natural factors:** Rainfall, wind, topography and flooding contribute to erosion through the natural forces of water and wind.
- **Human-induced factors:** Overgrazing, over-tilling, poor irrigation practices, urbanisation, deforestation and a lack of proper land management practices worsen erosion in farmlands.

By understanding these causes, farmers and land managers can implement appropriate erosion control measures and adopt sustainable practices to protect the soil, maintain fertility and prevent the long-term damage that erosion can cause to farmland.

CORRECTIVE STEPS

Fencing

Good fences will help with the management of grazing natural veld, grazing stalks and securing crops from wondering animals.

The carrying capacity refers to how many animals can be grazed per hectare. This figure depends on the climate, condition and type of grass. Ignoring these factors will lead to overgrazing, compaction and eventually erosion.

When maize stalks are grazed, four things primarily happen:

1. Compaction.
2. Damage to soil's structure.
3. Loss of valuable nutrients in the stalks eaten by animals.
4. Loss of soil cover.

Therefore, animals on maize stalks must not be in the fields for the whole winter, as they will cause soil compaction. The breakdown of soil's structure leads to the loss of valuable topsoil with wind and water erosion. With soil compaction, water will not be able to penetrate the soil and it will lead to dry and hard soils affecting soil cultivation and late planting times in the summer.

Fences not only help with veld management, but animal breeding programmes can also be implemented successfully, which is leading to higher profits. Well-maintained fences lead to super farmers, happy animals and good neighbours.

Some studies suggest that about 12 million ha of land is affected by severe erosion, which includes both sheet erosion and gully erosion.

Contours and using sloped lands

When deciding to plant on a slope, you have to make sure you use the right tillage practices and that contours are in place to slow the water down. Fast-flowing water will erode topsoil and eventually make a gully.

It is advisable to plant grass like Kikuyu on contours, as it will hold the soil in place and act like a sponge. Rocks, tyres and logs will also help to slow down the water in existing erosion areas.

Remember, with contours you are not trying to collect the water and funnel it to one place, as this only makes the water flow faster, leading to bigger erosion issues and massive gullies. Slow the water down to ensure that it has time to penetrate the soil.

Tillage practices

The soil depth is especially important. Erosion is caused by the topsoil getting water-logged and not penetrating down into the lower levels. Lands must be ripped every third year to break up the plough pan and compacted areas, helping water move below the topsoil and root systems. It can then be moved to the lower levels of the soil profile, utilising the available water and nutrients.

This practice will lead to better usage of the whole soil profile by plants.

→ **Top tip** : Always rip, disc and plant across the slope.

Sandy soils

These soils break down quickly and are very prone to water and wind erosion – and dry out quickly.

→ Minimum tillage, strip-till or no-till practices are recommended with sandy soils.

→ Minimum or no grazing on stubble increases the soil's ability to hold water by incorporating the stubble into the soil. It is therefore improving the soil's ability to hold moisture and form bonds with the soil structure, lessening the chance of soil erosion and leaching out valuable nutrients.



About 20% of South Africa's agricultural land is affected by erosion.



Growing cover crops during off-seasons can preserve the soil.

Increase vegetation cover

- **Plant grass and ground covers:** Deep-rooted plants and grasses help to anchor the soil and prevent erosion by stabilising the surface. Plants with fibrous root systems, such as fescue grass, can significantly reduce surface run-off.
- **Use cover crops:** Growing cover crops such as clover, vetch or rye during off-seasons can protect soil from erosion by creating a layer of vegetation that shields the soil from rain and wind.

Rainwater harvesting techniques

- **Rain gardens:** These shallow, vegetated basins are designed to capture and slow down rainwater, allowing it to percolate into the soil rather than running off the surface.
- **Rain barrels or cisterns:** Collecting rainwater and directing it into barrels or cisterns can help to control water run-off and reduce the erosion risk, especially in areas where intense rainfall is common.

By implementing a combination of these practices, you can significantly reduce erosion in clay soils and improve the long-term health and stability of the land. ■



ERIC WIGGILL, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER, PGP

A crop well-suited for dry summer production areas

SUNFLOWER IS A CROP THAT, RELATIVE TO OTHER CROPS, PERFORMS WELL UNDER DROUGHT CONDITIONS. THIS IS PROBABLY WHY IT IS POPULAR IN THE MARGINAL CROPPING AREAS OF SOUTH AFRICA. THE CROP IS DROUGHT TOLERANT AND HAS RELATIVELY LOW INPUT COSTS. DUE TO THE SHORT ACTIVE GROWING PERIOD OF SUNFLOWER, IT HAS A PLANTING WINDOW OF THREE MONTHS.

This crop is also well suited in flexible crop rotation systems. In fact, it should only be planted in a crop rotation system – especially in the dry summer production areas.

Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus L.*) is an annual oilseed crop that is globally cultivated on a production area of approximately 26 million ha, which results in ± 47,4 million metric tons of seed annually – an 8% share of the world oilseeds market. Sunflower oil is one of the world's major vegetable oils, often used in the food industry by the production of various related commercial products due to its high quality, high protein content and edibility.

The South African sunflower production area remains concentrated in the Free State and North West provinces, which together account for about 80% of the national area planted (on average) over the past ten years.

The ability of sunflowers to produce relatively consistent yields under adverse weather conditions, along with their overall characteristics of drought tolerance, make this crop an attractive option for farmers in dryland production regions. Sunflowers can also produce a crop on marginal soils and with very little or no additional fertiliser.

SOIL REQUIREMENTS

This crop is relatively well adapted to a wide range of soil texture classes and can be produced successfully where the soil clay content varies between 10% and 55%. It is indeed one of the few crops that can be successfully produced on heavy clay soil. However, in South Africa sunflower is mostly grown on soil with a clay content of less than 20%.

The following soil characteristics may impair sunflower production if not managed:

- **Windblown sand:** Sunflower is susceptible to wind damage during the seedling stage. High temperatures of the soils may limit emergence.
- **Crusts:** A soil inclined to crusting can seriously limit emergence.
- **Waterlogged soil:** During the first four weeks after planting, sunflower is sensitive to waterlogging.
- **Soil acidity:** Aluminium and manganese toxicity are associated with acidic soils. Sunflower is one of the most tolerant crops to manganese toxicity, but it is very susceptible to excessive aluminium. Soil with a pH of <4,5 (KCl) should be avoided, because this is the threshold where dissolved aluminium increases rapidly.

CLIMATIC REQUIREMENTS

Sunflower is adapted to a wide temperature range and is mainly produced in semi-arid regions globally. The oil concentration and oil quality are influenced by the temperature. Moderate temperatures during the seed-filling period favour a high oil content and quality.



Germination temperatures

This crop germinates from 10°C to 31°C, while the optimal germination temperature is about 26°C. Under South African conditions, the soil temperature is usually not restrictive to germination. However, high soil temperatures can affect the seedling vigour, especially in sandy and sandy-loam soils.

Growth temperature

The temperature is the most important factor determining the developmental rate of sunflower. As it gets warmer, the growth rate increases. Sunflower can tolerate extreme temperatures. During the seedling stage, it is moderately frost resistant and can survive at -2°C. After the six-leaf (V6) stage, it is very susceptible to frost. During the seed-filling stage, it can again survive temperatures as low as -2°C.

Water requirements

In comparison with other agronomic crops, sunflower is relatively drought tolerant. The effective and deep root system is a contributing factor to this tolerance. In comparison with other crops, such as maize, sunflower has the unique characteristic that it has a very low production starting point. This means that grain production theoretically begins at about 80 mm water use.

Sunflower yields are relatively low during favourable conditions and high water use. The low-yield starting point is the most outstanding characteristic of sunflower that makes it possible to produce sunflower economically in drier environments and on low-potential soils.



A farmer preparing his lands where sunflower will be planted.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Soil preparation

Sunflower reacts positively to good soil preparation. This crop is very sensitive to unfavourable conditions during and shortly after germination, as well as to weed competition. A fine seed bed and effective weed control are thus extremely important for ensuring a good stand.

Planting dates

Planting can occur from the beginning of November until the end of December in the eastern half and until mid-January in the western half of the Highveld. Possible planting dates are determined by the occurrence of rain.

A number of factors need to be considered when deciding to plant or not, namely:

- The possibility of frost damage.
- Drought during grain filling.
- Bird damage.
- The possibility of a high soil temperature during emergence.

A farmer planning to plant sunflower as the main crop should consider planting during November and no later than the end of December to reach the target yield. Sunflower planted later in the season, especially during January, will have a lower yield potential.

Plant population

Evenly spaced plants at the appropriate population is the basis for a high yield. The yield potential determines the appropriate plant population. Higher potential conditions require higher plant populations. It has been proved in practice that populations of 30 000 to 45 000 plants per hectare are the best.

Planting depth and technique

Sunflower seed is planted relatively shallow. In soil with a high clay content, seed is planted 25 mm deep and in sandy soils 25 mm to 60 mm deep.

Cultivar choice

The cultivar choice is an essential aspect in the production process, since the yield of two cultivars grown side by side often differ with as much

as 0,5 ton ha⁻¹. A sound cultivar choice is a simple and cheap way to optimise sunflower production. The seed yield is the most important measure when evaluating cultivars.

The following factors must be considered when choosing the right cultivars:

- High yield potential, especially in terms of oil mass.
- High oil content.
- Good standability (well-developed roots and strong stalks).
- Even plant height.
- Disease resistance.
- Length of growing season.

The temperature is the most important factor determining the developmental rate of sunflower.

Fertilisation

Sunflower normally reacts well to nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) fertilisation where these elements are deficient in the soil. It is essential that any fertilisation programme is based on a soil analysis. This will not only lead to accurate fertilisation rates but can also limit unnecessary costs.

Although sunflower's potassium (K) uptake is high, fertilisation with K is usually unnecessary. Yellowing of the lower leaf tips of the plant usually indicates a K deficiency, which progresses to dying of the leaf tips, while the leaf base remains green. These leaves will eventually fall off.

Fertiliser application – depending on the expected yields and the residual soil N – varies in practice from none in N-rich soil to 140 kg N ha⁻¹. An N excess, or over-fertilisation, can cause excessive water consumption, fungal diseases, lodging and a drop in grain oil content.

A micro-element deficiency such as iron, manganese, copper, zinc and chlorine should first be identified through a plant analysis before a corrective fertiliser is applied. When fertilising where there is no deficiency, the yield will not increase. In fact, the risk exists that micro-elements may even reach toxic levels. An independent expert should be consulted to assist with the diagnosis and correction of the deficiency.

Weed control

Sunflower is very sensitive to weed competition, particularly in the young stage. If weeds are not effectively controlled during the first six to eight weeks after emergence, up to 50% of the potential yield may be lost.

Disease control

The spread of sunflower diseases varies from year to year, depending on climatic conditions. Certain diseases are more prevalent in dry years, while the development of others is aggravated by cold and wet conditions.

While many diseases can affect sunflower, the only one of real economic importance is Sclerotinia head rot. The most effective and economical way of controlling diseases is to plant resistant cultivars and to follow sound agricultural practices such as crop rotation, planting only treated seeds and sanitation by removing diseased plants from the land. ■



DR SAFIAH MA'ALI, SENIOR RESEARCHER: ARC-GRAIN CROPS, POTCHEFSTROOM. FIRST PUBLISHED IN PULA, OCTOBER 2022.

Guidelines for first-time soybean growers

A FARMER SHOULD MAKE THE DECISION TO PLANT SOYBEANS AT LEAST TWO YEARS BEFORE THE FIRST PRODUCTION SEASON (ACTUAL PLANTING) AS THERE ARE A NUMBER OF FACTORS THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED AND ADDRESSED BEFORE PRODUCTION BEGINS.

THE RIGHT LAND AND SOIL

All compacted layers should be broken up (ripped). It is also important to use lands that are not rocky and/or very uneven. Soybeans are harvested at a low level (30 mm to 60 mm), and the harvester blade can be damaged if lands are uneven and/or rocky. Lands that are prone to waterlogging and yellow nut sedge (*uintjies*) should also be avoided.

The most important factor is to obtain soil samples of the earmarked areas, have these samples analysed and do the necessary soil corrections that are recommended from the samples. The pH and lime requirements are particularly important, as the lime application should be done on the crop planted before soybeans. If large corrections of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) are required, a large part of it can also be done on the preceding crop.



Alfred Gondo, the 2024 Grain SA Potential Commercial Farmer of the Year, in his soybean field.



A healthy soybean crop. Photo: Martin Budgen.

KNOW THE FACTS

Herbicides: An important factor to consider is the possible transmission of herbicides from one season (crop) to another season (crop). For instance, herbicides that are used in maize and wheat production can generally not be used on soybeans. There are also waiting periods before soybeans can be planted in the same soil where certain herbicides were used previously. It is advisable to withdraw herbicides that have a waiting period of ten to twelve months at least two years prior to planting soybeans in the same soil.

Harvesting: When a farmer makes use of contract harvesting, he/she should ensure that the contract makes provision for a set harvest date. The number of days between planting and harvesting varies greatly between seed cultivars. It is therefore important to obtain this information from seed companies.

CHOOSING SUITABLE CULTIVARS

Currently more than 40 different soybean cultivars are sold by various seed companies. It is important that seed is ordered before the season starts (as early as May), to ensure that farmers get the specific cultivar that they want.

Maturity groups: All cultivars can be categorised in maturity groups, which indicate the number of days that it takes from the date of planting to reach maturity and be ready for harvesting. A maturity group of 000 is planted in cooler areas, while a maturity group of 10 is planted in warm areas.

Maturity groups are furthermore divided in tenths within groups, for example 4,4 or 6,2. In South Africa, groups 4, 5 and 6 are most often planted and sometimes group 7. Groups 4 and 5 are planted in the cooler areas, groups 5 and 6 in the moderate climate areas, and groups 6 and 7 in the warm areas.

Plant more than one maturity group to mitigate the risks of drought, hail and diseases. It also prolongs the harvesting period.

Growth pattern: Certain soybean cultivars have a specific growth pattern. This means that it starts to bloom and finishes blooming within four to six weeks, and it ends on the main stem with a raceme of pods.

The other type of growth pattern is non-specific. It is very sensitive to daylight and blooming will only start when the night-time is a certain length. If this type of soybeans experiences drought conditions, it will stop growing and start producing pods. However, when there is moisture again, it will continue to grow and bloom until it reaches a certain number of days after planting.

Seed mass and structure: A bushy structure has bigger potential because of more side stems. Also consider resistance to shattering late in the season and plant height – plants with a height of 76 cm to 80 cm are big enough and will be less prone to fall over than taller plants. ■



WESSEL VAN WYK, SOYBEAN SPECIALIST AND CONTRACTOR, PROTEIN RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Reasons to consider crop rotation with soybeans

ALL FARMERS STRIVE TO ACHIEVE AN OPTIMAL PROFIT PER HECTARE IN ADDITION TO GOOD YIELDS. HOWEVER, YEARS OF MONOCULTURE PRACTICES HAVE HAD DETRIMENTAL CONSEQUENCES IN THE LONG RUN. ALTHOUGH PEST AND DISEASE CONTROL WAS INITIALLY EASIER, TODAY WEEDS AND INSECTS THAT ARE DIFFICULT TO CONTROL CAUSE MAJOR HEADACHES.

CROP ROTATION OFFERS A SOLUTION

One solution is to include different crops in a crop rotation system. This practice not only contributes to biodiversity and improved soil health and quality, but also offers solutions for pest control. It is a core element in the management of cultivation risks and forms one of the cornerstones of sustainable production.

According to Hendrik van Staden, unit head of Syngenta Seed in South Africa, a crop rotation system offers the following benefits:

- **Limiting plant diseases:** Crop rotation can help to control plant diseases on different crops.
- **Managing weed pressure:** Weeds compete with crops for water, nutrients, sunlight and space, and can reduce grain yields by up to 20%. Crop rotation makes it possible to use different herbicides on different crops to control weeds. Not only is it a good practice to reduce the build-up of herbicide resistance, but effective weed control in one crop means that another crop can be grown without having to use expensive selective herbicides for it in the following season. The potential for the build-up of herbicide residues in the soil profile is also limited.
- **Increased soil fertility:** Crop rotation offers the opportunity to utilise the nitrogen that is captured in the soil by certain legumes, such as soybeans. It had been demonstrated in trials and other



practices that wheat planted after a legume on the same field leads to a higher yield and increased protein.

- **Improved profitability:** The inclusion of a legume or oilseed crop in the crop rotation system can increase the profitability because yields improve in certain cases. According to a publication by the Protein Research Foundation, several local and international trials indicate that maize planted after soybean yields show a yield jump of at least 10% compared to monoculture maize (Dreyer, 2017).
- **Spreading risk:** Because it is difficult to predict how a season will develop, it is advisable to spread the risk as far as is practically possible. A crop rotation system offers an excellent solution.

Van Staden warns that proper planning of a crop rotation system is essential. 'The production risks of each crop must still be considered. It remains important for farmers to familiarise themselves with the finer cultivation aspects of alternative or rotational crops.'

SOYBEAN PRODUCTION

Soybeans are one of the most important sources of oil and protein worldwide. Over the past decade, the production of soybeans has gradually increased in South Africa.

The crop's popularity in crop rotation systems is increasing due to soybeans' nitrogen fixation capacity and extensive root system. When used in crop rotation, soybeans restore the soil health. This is usually visible in the yield of the next maize crop, while lower input costs and a favourable risk profile ensure that soybeans are profitable in their own right.

According to Hanlie Geldenhuys, an expert on row-crops at Syngenta South Africa, the following four aspects are important in soybean production:

- **Protect the seed:** Seed treatment protects the germinating seed and seedling from the outset. This ensures proper germination, good root development and vigorous seedlings that help to achieve a balanced stand.
- **Weed control:** Weeds compete with crops for light, water and nutrients, and can significantly reduce the soybean quality and yield.
 - **Insect control:** Insect pests, particularly soil insects, can cause significant damage – especially at the beginning of the season. Bollworm can harm the grain quality later in the season.
 - **Disease control:** When soybean plants begin to flower, diseases that inhibit photosynthesis in particular can adversely affect the plant and yield. ■

MAGDA DU TOIT, SA GRAAN/GRAIN CONTRIBUTOR. FIRST PUBLISHED IN AFRIKAANS IN SA GRAAN/GRAIN, SEPTEMBER 2024.





lets a farming engine run smoothly

RUNNING A FARMING BUSINESS NORMALLY HAS TWO DISTINCT CHARACTERISTICS TO BE SEEN AS SUCCESSFUL: IT HAS TO BE SUSTAINABLE (CONSERVING AN ECOLOGICAL BALANCE BY AVOIDING THE DEPLETION OF NATURAL RESOURCES) AND IT HAS TO BE PROFITABLE (YIELDING PROFIT OR FINANCIAL GAIN).

Although it seems simple, most farmers dedicate their whole careers to achieving and maintaining these goals. Maybe you decide to implement a sustainable method of producing something to find out that it is not be a profitable method, or you strive for profitability at the cost of sustainability.

A profitable farming business is one where the income that is generated from selling products or services is higher than the expenses that are incurred to generate the income. The author Sol Luckman said: 'It takes money to make money.' As a farmer, you have to spend money to produce goods or services to sell and generate an income.

The typical expenses for a farming business include salaries and wages, electricity, input costs, telephone costs, insurance, repairs and maintenance, amongst others. These expenses have to be covered monthly, whether you receive an income or not, and can pose a challenge to farmers.

Think about a crop farmer who gets an income only once a year after harvesting and selling his/her crops, or a livestock farmer who only gets an income when calves or lambs are sold. This is what makes farming unique – the fact that you work in natural production cycles and do not receive a regular income but have to make provision for regular expenses.

A farm operating on a well-planned positive cash flow is like the performance of a well-oiled machine – the machine's engine, bearings and gears operate smoothly, and the machine can perform well. A well-oiled machine does not break down easily and tends to endure longer. So how do you ensure a well-planned positive cash flow and a well-oiled farming business?

STEP 1: PLAN THE CASH FLOW

The first step is to do a cash flow projection for the farming business. Start by writing down the expected income for the next twelve months – what income are you expecting (how much) and when (in which month)? Then write down the expenses in the same manner (how much and when), so that you can see how much money you need each month and if the income will be sufficient to cover the costs.

The difference between the income and expenses is called a surplus or deficit. A surplus occurs if the income is higher than the expenses, and a deficit occurs if the expenses are higher than the income.

During the months when you generate a surplus (after selling crops or livestock), the surplus needs to be saved to make provision for the months of deficit to continue covering the expenses, although there is no income in these months.

Planning the cash flow is a crucial first step so that you as the farmer and financial manager knows what to expect from the next year's financial projections, and that you can make provision for the months when the business will have a financial deficit.

STEP 2: EVALUATE THE SOURCES AND FREQUENCY OF INCOME

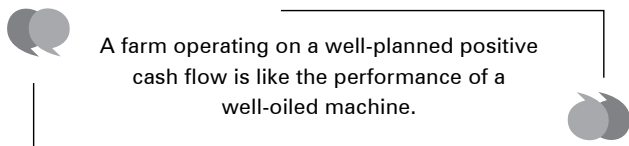
To generate a surplus/profit, a farmer can do one of two things: Increase the income or decrease the expenses. Depending on your type of farming business, increasing the income is not as easy as it seems because the income depends on the yields you obtain and the prices you get for the products. However, you can ensure that you do everything within your control (production practices, planting time and applying the right inputs) to the best of your ability with the available resources.

If the income is not sufficient to cover the expenses, evaluate ways to increase the income from your current production (higher yields or prices). If this is not possible, evaluate ways to generate an alternative source of income for your farm.

Some ideas for extra farming and non-farming income may include:

- Do contract work with your equipment to generate an income.
- Offer services to other farmers or businesses in your community (transport, delivery of inputs, accommodation, etc.).
- Evaluate other enterprises that can be beneficial to your farming business (chickens for meat or eggs, vegetables or livestock that can supplement the farm's income).
- See if you can sell your product in other months, when the prices are traditionally higher.
- Look for part-time employment for yourself or your family members to supplement the household's income.

Evaluating the sources and frequency of the farm's income will help you get a clear picture of the expected income for the next year and to determine if there is any room for improvement on the income side.



STEP 3: EVALUATE THE NECESSITY AND SCOPE OF THE EXPENSES

As soon as the expenses have been listed in the cash flow projection, it is a good practice to go through the expenses line by line and evaluate the expenses critically according to their level of necessity.

Asking the following questions may help:

- Is this expense really necessary for the farm to operate?
- Will this expense contribute to an increasing income, efficiency or saving of other costs?
- Can I procure this item at a cheaper cost elsewhere – or can I negotiate a lower price with my current supplier?
- Can I save on using this product/service more sparingly?

Most of the time farmers say their expenses are 'cut to the bone'. But whenever you go through this exercise, you will see if there are still

areas for improvement. When trying to cut expenses or save costs, start with the highest expenses where the savings will have the biggest impact on the farm's cash flow.

However, a note of caution: Do not save on costs where the saving will hurt your production – for example, do not save on buying and applying less fertiliser. The savings will have a greater negative impact on your yield and subsequently, your ability to generate an income.

STEP 4: GET CREATIVE

When you have followed the first three steps and the farm's cash flow is still too tight and raising concerns, it is time to get creative. Think of alternative ideas to increase the farm's income or decrease the expenses.

Talking to other farmers, reading articles or magazines about agriculture, and attending training or study groups can also help you stimulate your thoughts. There are so many success stories of farmers who, in times of trouble, had to introduce a new enterprise, buy or sell in groups (as a cooperative), or start a new venture to make ends meet.

The sky is the limit and South African farmers are known for their ability to rise to challenging times and make plans to overcome it. Whatever idea or solution you pursue, make sure it is something that you would like to do, have a passion for, and will be able to do properly and successfully. Do not chase after 'profitable ideas' because someone told you it is highly profitable. Evaluate every opportunity thoroughly, prepare a cash flow projection and talk to experts in the field about its feasibility.

Your business is a running machine – check the oil (cash flow) frequently and top it up to ensure the business is running like a well-oiled machine, performing well and standing the test of time. ■



YOLANDI KRUGER,
AGRICULTURAL ADVISOR
AT DUNAMUS



When food systems function well, agriculture can provide huge economic opportunities for smallholder communities.

~ AGNES KALIBATA
AGRA president



Avoid the pitfalls of a **FIXED-TERM CONTRACT**

A QUESTION THAT IS OFTEN ASKED DURING THE BUSY PLANTING AND/OR HARVESTING PERIODS ON SOUTH AFRICAN FARMS AND NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED CAREFULLY, IS: 'I NEED TO EMPLOY ADDITIONAL PEOPLE FOR THIS PLANTING SEASON, BUT CANNOT KEEP THEM IN SERVICE FOR THE WHOLE YEAR. IS THERE AN OPTION AVAILABLE TO ME THAT DOES NOT FALL OUTSIDE OF THE LABOUR LAWS?'

Seasonal and/or fixed-term contracts of employment are contractual arrangements that are often misused and abused by employers to evade their statutory obligations in terms of the *Basic Conditions of Employment Act* and the *Labour Relations Act*.

Commissioners at the CCMA and inspectors of the Department of Labour frown upon the use of these contracts. They view it as a tool used by employers to save money by denying workers possible payment towards provident funds, medical aids and severance.

This is, however, a pity because agricultural producers are not unscrupulous and irresponsible when they engage workers in fixed-term or seasonal contracts. Most agricultural operations have a genuine need to employ additional employees in addition to their permanent staff during certain seasonal periods. The normal staff component is just not sufficient during planting, harvesting and spraying seasons.

AVOID PITFALLS

What is a fixed-term or seasonal contract?

This is a contract defined for the purposes of the *Labour Relations Act* as a contract that expires on one of the following conditions:

- The occurrence of a specified event. This may be at the conclusion of the planting season.
- The occurrence of a specified task or project. This may be the finalisation of the erection of a fence or any other clearly defined project.
- A fixed date, other than an employee's retirement age. An example of this is that your contract will commence on 1 December 2025 and end on 23 December 2025.



When farmers employ additional workers during the season, fixed-term contracts should be signed.

Please remember that the fixed-term contract of employment should only be used for work that is genuinely temporary of nature. If a producer cannot justify proper reasons for fixing the terms of the contract, the employee will be deemed as a permanent employee as per the deeming clause of the *Labour Relations Act*. If a contract is renewed or endures longer than a period of three months, the employee will be deemed as permanent. This will ultimately render the fixed-term contract null and void.

Normally, if the reasons mentioned above are clearly defined in the fixed-term contract, the termination of the contract will not be viewed as an unfair dismissal. Therefore it is very important to conclude the agreement with the stipulated clauses before the employee starts working.

Many employers say that they agreed with the workers that their contract is of a fixed-term nature and after a week of employment the employee refuses to sign the agreement. Make sure that the agreement is signed before the employee starts working.

What are justifiable reasons to enter into a fixed-term/seasonal contract with your employee?

It is categorically stated that probation is not a valid reason for entering into a fixed-term contract. Often people sit in front of a CCMA commissioner, where the employee states that he was informed that he will receive a three-month contract and if his services are satisfactory, he will receive a permanent contract.

Unfortunately this practice creates a reasonable expectation that the contract will be renewed or become permanent on the same or similar terms on conclusion of the specified period. The unfortunate effect of this created expectation is that it may be viewed as an unfair dismissal on termination of the fixed-term contract of employment.

It is also a very good practice to include a clause in the agreement that is clearly stipulating who the person is that may authorise the extension, renewal or making the contract permanent. This will ensure that the employee does not say that a supervisor not mentioned created the expectation that the contract may become permanent.

IN CONCLUSION

- Fixed-term contracts are often over-used or used inappropriately by South African employers. Make sure that there is a real reason for using fixed-term contracts.
- Fixed-term employees have the same rights and obligations as permanent employees.
- Fixed-term employees should adhere to the same disciplinary rules and procedures as permanent employees and are entitled to unemployment insurance, leave, sick leave, PAYE, etc. on termination of employment.

For any clarity or more information, contact the author by email at dirk@nvbd.co.za. ■



DIRK COETZEE,
LABOUR RELATIONS SPECIALIST



Regular maintenance is essential

MAINTENANCE PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN AGRICULTURE TO KEEP EQUIPMENT RELIABLE AND RUNNING. REGULAR MAINTENANCE IS ESSENTIAL AS IT HELPS TO PREVENT BREAKDOWNS, REDUCES DOWNTIME AND ENSURES THAT EQUIPMENT LASTS LONGER AND PERFORMS BETTER.

FIVE REASONS FOR REGULAR MAINTENANCE

1. **Safety:** Equipment that is not well maintained can create unsafe working conditions and hazards, which can lead to workers being injured.
2. **Reduce downtime and maximise uptime:** Well maintained equipment is less likely to break down unexpectedly, which will save you time and money.
3. **Improve fuel efficiency:** Well maintained equipment is more fuel efficient, which can lower operating costs.
4. **Save money:** Regular maintenance can save money, as attending to equipment issues early on is much less expensive than repairing them after they break down or having to replace them.
5. **Ensure quality:** If equipment isn't maintained, the quality of the product being produced may be affected.

TEN MAINTENANCE STEPS

Agricultural machinery is a significant investment for a farmer. Therefore, keeping equipment well maintained is essential to protect your investment. Maintaining farm equipment is crucial to ensure its durability and efficiency. Here are ten essential steps to follow:

1. **Clean** equipment after each use to prevent dirt and debris from causing damage or corrosion.
2. Check all **fluid levels** regularly, as low fluid levels can cause damage to the machinery. Replace or refill oil, coolant, hydraulic fluid and fuel as needed.
3. Inspect **tyres** for wear, cracks or low pressure. Ensure they are inflated to the recommended pressure.
4. Keep mower, cutter and tiller **blades** sharp to improve performance and reduce strain on machinery.
5. **Lubricate** all moving parts regularly to reduce wear and tear on the equipment.
6. Replace worn **parts** such as belts, hoses and filters if they show signs of wear or damage. Making timely repairs will prevent further damage to the equipment.
7. Check **electrical systems** – test batteries, lights and wiring for proper function and clean corroded terminals.
8. **Store** agricultural machinery in a dry, covered location to protect it and prevent it from weathering.
9. Always follow the **manufacturer's instructions** for operation and maintenance.
10. Keep a **log** of maintenance activities, including repairs and part replacements, for better tracking and planning. ■

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COMPILED BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR, PULA





LIVESTOCK THEFT leads to huge losses

THE ECONOMIC LOSS OF LIVESTOCK THEFT FOR THE RED MEAT INDUSTRY AMOUNTS TO MILLIONS OF RANDS PER YEAR. IT IS NOT ONLY ABOUT THE ECONOMIC LOSS FOR PRODUCERS AND LIVESTOCK OWNERS, BUT ALSO THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT IT HAS ON THEM. THIS CRIME HAS ALSO CHANGED FROM ORDINARY 'POT SLAUGHTER' TO A SYNDICATED CRIME.

The National Stock Theft Prevention Forum discussed several matters of critical importance during its last meeting for the year, which was held on 13 November 2024. The Forum was of the opinion that the police should again declare livestock theft as a priority crime and place it in the same category as the theft of copper, fuel and other ferrous metals. The economic loss of livestock theft to the South African economy is astronomical.

Another aspect that is of concern to the forum, is the increase in illegal hunting with dogs in livestock theft. An appeal is made to producers to report this trend to the Stock Theft Units and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), as this practice is mostly accompanied by brutality and animal abuse. The additional charge of animal cruelty in a livestock theft case can contribute to an aggravating sentence.

The Forum is closely involved with the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) regarding support for the training of state prosecutors for livestock theft cases. In this regard, liaison was also established with Justice College. However, the Forum understands the financial challenges faced by the National Prosecuting Authority, as well as Justice College.

Finally, the National Stock Theft Prevention Forum seriously appeals to producers to become more involved in the rural safety structures, the establishment of Stock Theft Information Centres (STICs) and the reporting of any livestock theft case, no matter how minor.

It is an established fact that several livestock theft cases can be linked to a specific accused to contribute to an aggravating sentence. It is important that producers must be aware of the value that the Forfeiture Unit of the NPA can add to an aggravated sentence and the seizure of the accused's vehicles used in livestock theft.

TIPS TO KEEP LIVESTOCK SAFE

- Ensure that your livestock register is up to date.
- Make sure you inspect your fences regularly – this is something you should do yourself. Do not rely on your workers.
- Keep your local stock theft investigation officer's contact details at hand.
- Avoid falling into a routine. Do not visit your livestock and grazing camps at the same time every day.
- If you are going to be away from the farm, make sure your absence is uploaded to your local security groups. If possible, ask a neighbour to visit your farm unexpectedly – this should also not be at a specific time every day.
- Be aware of any movement in your area, especially of unfamiliar vehicles. Ask your workers to report suspicious/unknown vehicles immediately.
- If possible, do not let your livestock graze in paddocks bordering access roads or national roads.
- In case of a stock theft, report it immediately. Get a case number and follow up on the case.
- Ensure that all your livestock are branded, as this is the only way to prove ownership.

Source: <https://rpo.co.za/nasionale-veediefstal-voorkomingsforum-bespreek-verskeie-sake-van-belang-nasional-stock-theft-prevention-forum-addresses-a-number-of-issues/> ■

RPO NEWSLETTER, DECEMBER 2024

Corner Post

BY LOUISE KUNZ, ASSISTANT EDITOR

JERRY MTHOMBOTHI, REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER AT PGP'S MBOMBELA OFFICE IN MPUMALANGA, HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THE FARMER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR 21 YEARS. IN THIS TIME, HE HAS BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE MORE THAN 50 STUDY GROUPS THAT HE HAS SERVICED – AND HAS TRAINED MORE THAN 2 000 SUBSISTENCE AND EMERGING FARMERS.

His passion and commitment to helping farmers led to his decision in May 2024 to postpone his retirement and continue working with beginner and developing farmers in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. What motivates Jerry to keep on going, is that this job is so rewarding. 'I love my job. It makes me feel good and happy when I see farmers being well trained and improving, so that they can farm profitably and sustainably and can become self-reliant.'

During the 21 years of guiding and mentoring farmers, Jerry has learned valuable life lessons. One of these is that you need a lot of patience when you work with people, and you need to respect people, no matter who they are. Without passion for the job, mentoring can easily become an effort. He also discovered that he has a big heart, and that perseverance and compassion are two of his strongest characteristics.

Last year turned out to be a year full of highlights for Jerry. Two of the winners of the

Farmer of the Year competition hailed from his area. He was 'over the moon' when his mentee, Jim Besabakhe Masemola, who farms in Sehlakwane Village near Groblersdal in Mpumalanga, was announced as the 2024 Grain SA/Land Bank Smallholder Farmer of the Year. Jerry has been closely involved in Jim's farming operation since 2018 and says this hardworking farmer really deserves the award.

Two of the people who have played major roles in Jerry's life, are his grandfather and his pastor. His grandfather, who farmed with livestock and crops, ignited his passion for agriculture while he was still a young boy. From his pastor he has learned the value of staying calm and the importance of love and respect for others.

His advice to other mentors is the following: 'Let us do the work that God has sent us to do. This job that we are doing is a calling from God – it's not just an ordinary job that can be done by anybody. Always be willing to make a change in the lives of the people that you are servicing – there should be a difference because of your assistance.'

Jerry believes that it is important to have more friends than enemies. After he retires, he dreams of opening an office where he can advise people on how to improve their agricultural practices to generate profits and to minimise hunger and starvation in the country.



FACTS ABOUT THE MENTOR

Name: Jerry Mthombothi
Region: Mpumalanga/Limpopo (Mbombela office)
Position: Regional development manager
Mentors: Grandfather and pastor

*The mentor and his mentee
– Jerry with Jim Masemola*



HOW HAS HE IMPROVED AS A FARMER?

He follows the advice we give. The agricultural practices that have helped him improve his farming operation are the use of certified seeds such as BT maize and Roundup ready seeds, planting in the planting window and doing soil correction – ripping, liming and preparing a good seedbed. I really hope that he will one day have his own farm.

WHAT IMPRESSES YOU MOST ABOUT HIM?

Jim is always willing to help other people. He wants the farmers in his region to develop and reach the stage where he is. He uses his own farm implements, such as his boom sprayer, planter and harvester, to help neighbouring farmers and other members of the community. ■

THREE CHARACTERISTICS A MENTOR NEEDS:

- Good communication skills and respect for all people.
- You need to be passionate about what you do and you need a 'big heart'.
- Perseverance – keep going, even when the going gets tough.

THE MENTOR AND MENTEE

WHY DID YOU NOMINATE JIM?

Since 2021 it was clear that he has the potential to become a successful farmer. His yield improved drastically over the past three years. Jim is a respected leader in his community, who motivates other farmers to follow the correct production practices. He is also innovative, as he modified a Mazda 6 engine to use it for the milling of his maize.



A programme that is changing lives



Here's what you need to know about Congress

DURING JANUARY AND FEBRUARY, REGIONAL MEETINGS ARE HELD TO SHARE THE GRAIN SA GROUP OF ENTITIES' FOCUS AREAS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD. THESE TOPICS WILL ALSO BE ON THE TABLE AT THE 2025 CONGRESS ON 12 AND 13 MARCH, WHICH WILL ONCE AGAIN BE HELD AT NAMPO PARK NEAR BOTHAVILLE IN THE FREE STATE.

The 2025 Congress offers a wonderful platform for members, government officials, role-players, academics, partners and stakeholders to interact.

WHAT IS THE CONGRESS?

The Grain SA Congress is the annual general meeting of members. The function of Congress is, amongs other, the consideration and discussion of the annual financial statements, auditor's report and the report of the Grain SA board.

A chairperson, two vice-chairpersons and board members are elected during the proceedings. Once elected, the board has the authority to ensure that the objectives of the Grain SA group of entities are achieved.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF CONGRESS?

The function of Congress is:

- The consideration and discussion of the annual financial statements, auditor's report and the report of the board of Grain SA.
- The election of the chairperson and two vice-chairpersons.
- The election of board members of Grain SA.
- The appointment of an auditor and the approval of his fees.
- Handling of other special matters to be discussed.

HOW ARE DELEGATES ELECTED TO CONGRESS?

It is very important for members to carefully consider who to nominate as delegates from their region and who will best represent farmers' interests at Congress.

Members of Phahama Grain Phakama (PGP) pay annual membership fees, which give them access to the privileges and benefits produced by PGP. Commercial members also pay a commodity levy on all grain and oilseeds produced to Grain SA. They earn the right to influence decisions of the body through a constituted and democratic process.

At the regional meetings before Congress, delegates from the different regions will be nominated to attend. A delegate must be a bona fide farmer producing grain for the market – a person who knows farming issues in his region, who is able to understand the organisation's business and who will speak up for the farmers' interests.



A farmer who attends Congress as a delegate, must be a leader in his/her community.



Delegates have the responsibility of voting on very important matters that influence the activities of the organisation in terms of work done, leadership and even changes in the constitution. When chosen, delegates are informed of their rights and responsibilities when they are elected to represent their farming communities.

A farmer who attends Congress as a delegate, must be a leader in his/her community, someone who will be your voice at the general meeting and who will return home to tell farmers in his/her region what was discussed and decided there.

WHEN SHOULD FEES AND LEVIES BE PAID UP?

Membership fees and the commodity levy (if applicable) are paid annually for the period from 1 October to the end of September, when the financial year for membership fees and levies ends. The status of membership for delegates is determined by the payments received until the end of February that precedes Congress.

Only paid-up members can attend the Grain SA Congress as voting delegates, and they also qualify for free entry to Grain SA's NAMPO Harvest Day or other regional based events, such as NAMPO Cape.

WHAT ARE BREAKAWAY SESSIONS?

All delegates attend separate breakaway sessions, where a variety of matters regarding different commodities – maize, winter cereals, sunflower/sorghum, soybean and groundnut – are discussed. This is a valuable opportunity where the focus is on crop-specific issues.





Improving skills through learning opportunities

MANY different communication tools need to be employed to teach farmers modern technologies and ensure that significant and meaningful knowledge transfer is effected. The team has very strategically put different actions in place to respectfully guide and develop farmers by adopting a 'tell, teach and involve' method for the learning process.

Apart from study group sessions, several training courses are held. Farmers' days and demonstration trials offer more learning opportunities for those developing farmers. In the period from 11 November to 29 November, there were 123 study group meetings. Apart from the delivery of inputs, some training was also done.



At the Cancele Study Group meeting in the Kokstad region, it was clear why practical sessions are just as important as the theory. After a revision session on the use of chemicals, the group proceeded to do a demonstration in the garden. Farmers were so excited when they discovered how simple it was in practice compared to the theory.



Trial plots are a wonderful way of showing farmers the right thing to do, the right time to do it and the right way to do things – and even sometimes what not to do. In November, a demonstration trial was planted in the Manthole Village in Limpopo. All seed and chemicals were supplied by the Oil and Protein Seeds Development Trust (OPDT).



Farmers from the Ikamvalethu Study Group reading their latest copies of Pula, which they received at the meeting. This edition offered valuable information to farmers who also received chemicals and a lecture on planting and weed control.



As November is a very busy time for farmers, only two training courses were presented in this period. These were practical courses – planter calibration and sprayer calibration – both held in Maclear.

PERSONAL FOCUS ON GROUND LEVEL

THROUGH farm visits, the farmers in the Farmer Development Programme are receiving individualised support from the Farmer Development team for this summer season. From 11 November to 29 November 2024, a total of 105 farm visits took place, with 55 farmers benefitting from the team's inputs.



The regional development manager in the Free State, Jacques Roux, visited Madinda Matshinini. He advised her to do post-emergence spray as soon as possible to get rid of all the unwanted weeds – especially the watergrass that puts huge pressure on the soybean crop.



Mafika Mavuso adjusted the plant population from 25 000 to 38 850 plants per hectare. Mentor Timon Filter from the Louwsburg region is keen to see what the difference between bigger spacing and smaller spacing will realise. Mafika still puts manure on his crops, which is good for the soil health.



In Lichtenburg, Du Toit van der Westhuizen, regional development manager, found that his mentee, Allman Mpomela, had started planting as the soil was wet enough. Seed was delivered for the 50 ha that needs to be planted for SACTA. Allman also received the fertiliser for his maize.



At the time of the farm visit, farmer Simphiwe Mabuza had planted 157 ha of maize and was still busy planting soybeans. Mentor Chris de Jager from the Louwsburg area showed him why regular inspection of the plants is necessary as he found patches of poor germination in the maize and also some cutworm. The flooded soils could have prevented the uptake of phosphorus. ■

"New farmers should begin with small steps and expand gradually. If you put everything on the line at once and you come up short, you risk losing it all. It's wiser to start small and build up over time."



PROUD TO BE A PART OF YOUR STORY

I wasn't always a farmer. My journey began in finance, but everything changed after a visit to a commercial farm. It ignited my passion for agriculture and in 2017, I started my own farming venture with just two cows. I now manage over 800 hectares dedicated to crops and raising livestock. Our grain production has soared from 250 to over 1,500 tonnes annually by 2023 – a milestone I am incredibly proud of. For those new to farming, my advice is simple: start small and grow gradually. Understanding your soil through careful analysis is crucial and perhaps, most importantly, invest in high-quality seeds. That's why I choose Pannar. Their seeds deliver exceptional yields, even when conditions are less than ideal. With Pannar, I know I'm planting the best foundation for a bountiful harvest.

FARMER: Happy Letsitsa

FARMING ENTITY: Noitgedacht Farm, No 74

AREA: Hennenman District, Free State

CROP: Sunflower	PANNAR HYBRID USED: PAN 7160CLP (Sunflower)
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